

# Controlling and Informational Planned Behavior: Self-Determination Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior

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## Introduction

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a paradigm of human motivation and an approach to personality that focuses on an individual's psychological needs and how those needs interact with self motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). SDT explores the foundation of intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985) which can be applied as marketing theory. Additionally this theory offers the opportunity for comparison and integration with the theory of planned behavior (TPB). Deci and Ryan (1985) published this theory within the same year that Ajzen (1985) published the theory of planned behavior (TPB). While SDT has a predominantly intrinsic focus, TPB maintains a primarily extrinsic focus in the research literature.

Leavell's and Haan's (2014) paper presented to the Atlantic Marketing Association's annual conference investigated the potential of intrinsic motivation to extend TPB. As intrinsic motivation is a central focus of SDT, a broader investigation of the relationship between SDT and TPB is warranted. For, a weakness of SDT is the challenge of reducing the theory to a parsimonious equation. TPB does not have this problem as the literature is replete with hierarchical regression models demonstrating how much each antecedent variable within TPB explains the explanation of variance in intention.

This paper offers a brief overview of SDT and TPB. Then, it presents an investigation of the value of re-conceptualizing the variables of TPB through the paradigm of SDT. This investigation utilizes the framework presented by Haggard and Chatzisarantis (2005). This investigation reveals applications for marketing researchers and practitioners. Finally, the opportunities for further research are manifold.

## An Overview of SDT

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a motivational paradigm that is actually a collection of three smaller theories: cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory, and causality orientations theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). This basket of paradigms explains human behavior in terms of psychological needs

fulfillment. SDT arose as a theoretical paradigm by articulating the interactions between several constructs: intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, self-identity, locus of causality, psychological needs fulfillment, persistence, and autonomy (Deci et al., 1981; Deci and Ryan, 2000). Since its origins, the Academy has given SDT a considerable amount of consideration: A Google Scholar search indicates that more than 21,770 articles and books have referenced the seminal work of Deci and Ryan (1985).

Claiming a research tradition back to James (1890), Deci and Ryan (1985) synthesized findings from almost a century of personality and motivation research to create SDT. As motivational theorists shifted their focus to cognitive processes and away from the affective in the 1960's, Deci and Ryan (1985) felt some friction with that movement. They saw more power in explaining an individual's assessment of the value of a goal than simply an individual's cognitive assessment of achieving a particular goal. Through the prism of psychological needs, Ryan and Deci (2000) determined that motivation theory should concern how goal fulfillment addresses the needs that give value to a goal. It is from these seeds that SDT takes root.

The theory concerns the motivation of humans to achieve autonomy. Such autonomy occurs when individuals are free to engage in self-determined behavior. One of the factors that affect the perception of autonomy in decision making is described by the theory as the constructs of informational and controlling events. Considered as *event valence* within this paper, these constructs are on opposite ends of a spectrum. Informational events are those in which an individual feels freely able to engage. A person feels self-fulfillment when engaging in those events. Controlling events are those in which a person feels compelled to engage. This compulsion, even when subtly felt, reduces the self-fulfillment a person experiences when engaging in a particular behavior.

Researchers within the Academy have taken up the theory for investigation in various contexts. Marketing contexts have not been the primary arena for the theory's investigation. As it arises out of the school of psychology, the investigation of the theory has been primarily to determine its explanatory value to describe motivation generally. In more recent years, however, marketing researchers have begun investigating aspects of consumer behavior in light of self-determination theory.

Much of the non-marketing research with the theory has value for marketers, however. It has been deployed from a management perspective in addressing the intrinsic motivation of employees (Deci, Connell and Ryan, 1989). Such research is applicable within the marketing management school. The explanatory value of the theory was investigated relative to how consumers adhere to public policy (Moller, Ryan and Deci, 2006). The way consumers react to public policy may offer insight into how consumers react to marketing messages. Ryan's et al. (1991) investigation of how students learn when intrinsically motivated may address a marketer's desire to build brand equity. Martin and Hill (2012) researched how impoverished

consumers behave differently from other consumers relative to needs fulfillment. Such an investigation has implications for how marketers establish segmentation variables. Awad (2014) investigated the motivation of college students learning foreign languages: His conclusion was that *fun* was an important component for the fulfillment of psychological needs. Fun is a concept that many marketing practitioners seek to leverage. Research within the field of marketing, while not as frequent, has occurred.

The marketing research related to SDT has often addressed a specific construct within the theory rather than the overall paradigm. Bhattacharjee, Berger, and Menon (2014), for example, studied the role of agency in the expression of self identity and its relationship to purchase likelihood. Self-identity is one of the major components of how SDT explains intrinsic motivation. While published in the psychology literature, Suri et al. (2014) studied whether messages that enhanced an individual's feeling of autonomy would affect whether a person took the stairs or elevator in a particular context. Such an investigation is basic marketing research particularly helpful for the marketing of health-related products and services. Guo et al (2014), publishing in a consumer studies journal, investigated whether SDT explains consumer choices related to financial services: Autonomy and self-efficacy were the primary foci of that study. While formal marketing-related research with respect to SDT is limited, its role in explaining motivation and behavior is generally applicable to marketing within a consumer-research context.

International appreciation of the theory is evident based on Dysvik's, Kuvaas's, and Gagné's (2013) research on job satisfaction where they test the theory directly with respect to intrinsic motivation among Norwegian employees. Johri and Misra (2014) explored the construct of passion for work, utilizing the SDT paradigm for the investigation. George et al. (2013) demonstrated the role of psychological needs in an individual's choice to engage in physical activity. SDT was explanatory of the role of social support in influencing the choice to be physically active. Şimşek and Demir (2013) utilized SDT to examine the feelings of uniqueness among adolescents. While the founders of the theory conducted much of the early work in SDT, supporters of the theory have enabled a school of SDT to develop.

## **An Overview of TPB**

When Ajzen (1985) developed TPB he did so as an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) articulated TRA as a theory of motivation which considered just two antecedents of intention: attitude and subjective norms. Ajzen extended TRA to include perceived behavioral control as explaining not only variance in intention but variance in behavior as well (Figure 1). It is an elegant, parsimonious theory. TPB is one of the most widely tested theories of behavior in the history of the Academy (Ajzen, 2011). A Google Scholar search reveals over 70,000 results when searching for the theory of planned behavior (and "behaviour").

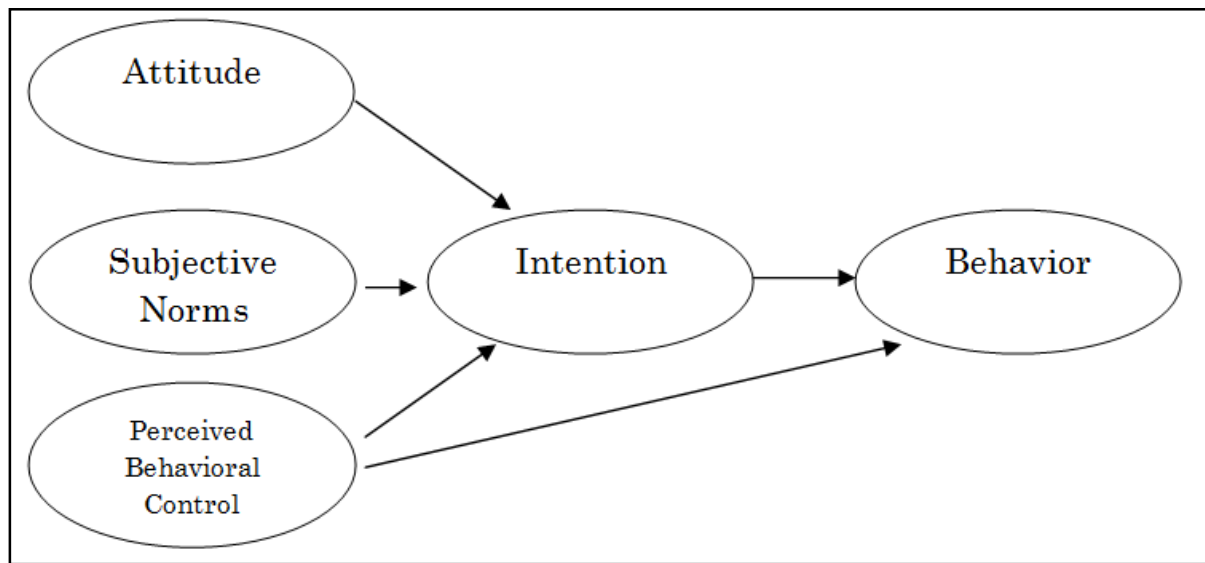


Figure 1. Framework of the theory of planned behavior.

As generally received, the theory of planned behavior considers attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as antecedents of intention (Ajzen, 2011). Perceived behavioral control is an antecedent of behavior as well as an antecedent of intention. Attitude encompasses an individual's evaluation of the benefits of engaging in a particular behavior. Subjective norms are the opinions of an individual's significant others relative to the behavior under consideration. Perceived behavioral control addresses an individual's perception of being able to accomplish the contemplated behavior.

A casual reading of the theory of planned behavior reveals a primarily extrinsic focus. The construct of attitude is extrinsic in terms of how it was formulated as an instrumental focus. Subjective norms, the opinions of significant others, are purely extrinsic. Even perceived behavioral control has an extrinsic mode as it relates to how an individual is able to operate within the extended world. From the mindset of SDT, this suggests a locus of causality that is external to the individual. Additionally, TPB does not address the concept of informational and controlling events. Studies have investigated whether TPB may be more efficacious in some contexts than in others (Ajzen, 2011). Ajzen has conceded that the focus of the theory is goal-oriented behavior. For behaviors that are not goal oriented, the theory may not offer as much explanation. The event-valence construct may offer some direction in improving TPB's efficacy in a broader array of contexts.

## Event Valence and TPB

Ryan and Deci (1985) articulated a valence to behavior: There is behavior that is in response to controlling events and behavior that is in response to informational

events. They define controlling events as events that may be self determined but are based on emotions that are not *autotelic*, that is, not engaging in an activity for the sake of the activity itself. These actions are purely to fulfill some external need. For example, a wife that works solely to support her husband and child in a job she hates would be a response to a controlling event. While she is choosing to go to work each day, she feels compelled to do so and does not feel truly free in punching the clock. She is not going to work for the sake and enjoyment of fulfilling her duties at her job. Informational events are ones that support the goals, aims, and desires of the individual. In a different context, the same wife as mentioned above hears about another job for which she is qualified that involves animals. She really enjoys working with animals. Her decision to change jobs would be in response to informational events because they align with her internal aims and goals. In both cases the individual is exercising her faculties to freely select what she will do. However, in the former, she feels a compulsion to work; in the latter, she feels a fulfillment in her work.

The theory of planned behavior should incorporate these elements into its investigation. As presently developed, the theory has a predominantly external focus and does not address intention development in light of informational and controlling events. The following section investigates the relevance of including informational and controlling constructs within the decomposed model of TPB as articulated by Hagger and Chatzisarantis (Figure 2, 2005).

According to Hagger and Chatzisarantis (2005), TPB addresses attitude in two ways. Instrumental attitude, which aligns much more closely with its original formation (Ajzen, 1985), is a function of an individual's contemplation of the benefits of a given behavior. If an individual believes that positive outcomes will result due to some behavior, then that individual is more likely to develop an intention to engage in that behavior.

The second part of the attitudinal dyad is affective attitude: This construct relates to how the individual expects to enjoy engaging in a specific behavior (Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2005). The more enjoyment the individuals expect, the more likely they are to engage in the behavior. While the literature does not generally address SDT when articulating this model, there is a sense of informational and controlling events in this paradigm. If individuals are acting purely to fulfill an instrumental aim, even if they do not enjoy the activity, such as the example wife above, this would be intention development in reaction to controlling events. If the individual has a high degree of affective attitude toward a behavior, this might demonstrate intention development relative to an informational event. There may be value in studying TPB in light of controlling versus informational events.

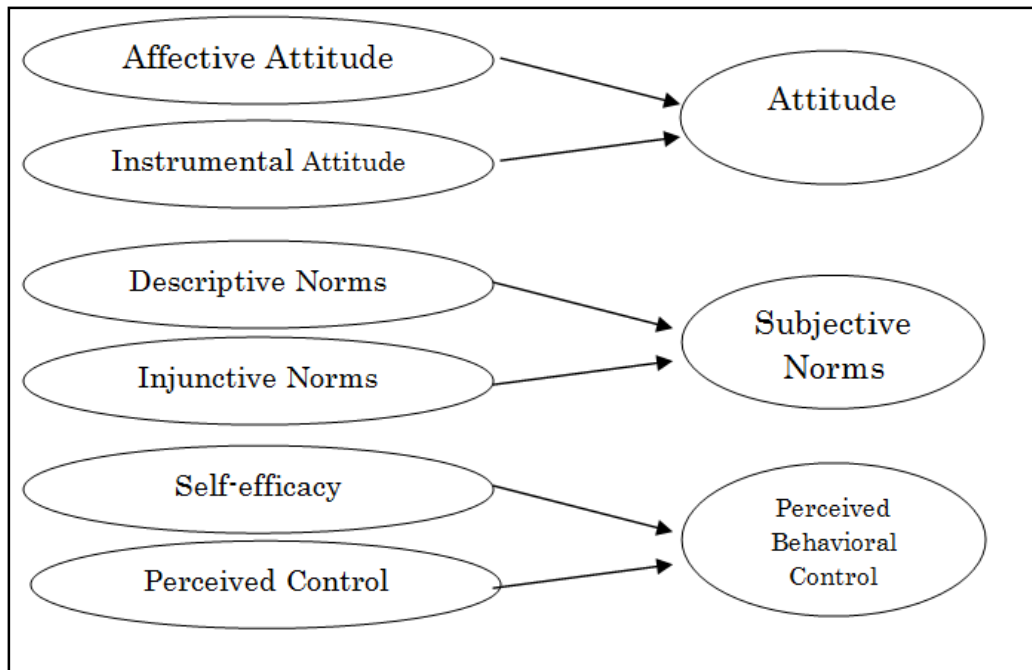


Figure 2. Hagger's and Chatzisarantis' decomposition of TPB

Subjective norms are divided by Hagger and Chatzisarantis (2005) into injunctive norms and descriptive norms. Injunctive norms are those behaviors of which individuals perceive their significant others will approve. So, if individuals contemplate training for a marathon, they may feel that their friends think positively of that behavior. Thus, they are more likely to develop the intention of training for a marathon. Descriptive norms are those behaviors in which individuals' friends actually engage. So if subjects have friends that actually train for marathons, then they may join in with them in that training.

In each of these contexts, controlling and informational events may be taking place. In the example of the working wife above, she may have the reputation of a hard-working woman with her significant others approving of her behavior in either of the two jobs discussed. Thus, her intention develops in either an informational or controlling context. With descriptive norms, the prospective marathon runners, mentioned above, might be truly longing to run with their friends. Such would be an intention developed in an informational context. However, if the marathon prospects are running simply in response to peer pressure, then those prospects are developing intentions in the context of controlling events. Such clarification of contexts within TPB may improve the explanation of variance in intention.

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) has two elements according to Hagger and Chatzisarantis (1985). Those elements are self-efficacy and perceived control. Self efficacy relates to how skilled individuals perceive themselves to be relative to some activity. If individuals used to run in high school, they may perceive in themselves a particular skill, albeit rusty, with respect to running. Thus, the

decomposed TPB posits that those individuals are more likely to develop the intention to train for a marathon. Perceived control relates to the access individuals have for some activity. Even if an individual is a world-class runner, should she find herself a quadriplegic as the result of some tragic accident, she may be less likely of developing an intention to run a marathon. Again, this bifurcation of the perceived behavioral control construct is homologous to the controlling versus informational contexts.

Self efficacy would on its face address informational contexts. Individuals may be more likely to feel efficacious towards activities they enjoy. In fact, Deci and Ryan (1985) discussed individuals' needs for optimal challenges to feel self determined. If an activity is so simple that they are not challenged, like crossing a room, they may not feel autonomy in the decision to pursue that activity. Even if they are unsure of their ability to complete an activity, but they feel challenged to complete it, they may develop the intention to attempt the activity. Thus, even though the construct of self efficacy may allow for action within a controlling-event context, it does appear pre-disposed toward informational events.

Perceived control, on the other hand, seems pre-disposed to controlling events. For, TPB presumes an individual will perform an intended behavior unless there is a controlling event preventing the fulfillment of that intention. The example of the paraplegic runner above is an example of this. If an individual does not even develop an intention to perform some action based on a perception of lack of access to the behavior, that person is developing that intention in the context of a controlling event. Where SDT offers value in possibly improving TPB's explanatory power relates to the event valence of perceived control. An individual may make significant strides to overcome a lack of access for informational events, but may readily identify barriers to access for controlling events. Such valences should be tested within the TPB framework.

## **Applications for Practitioners**

Motivation is an important component of consumer behavior (Leng et al., 2011; Martin and Hill, 2013; Guo et al., 2013). SDT addresses consumer behavior with respect to a consumer's motivation for buying activity (Moller, Ryan, and Deci, 2006). When consumers feel loyalty to a brand, SDT addresses this through its construct of internalization (O'Donnell and Brown, 2012). Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that intrinsic motivation is connected to psychological needs. Marketing practitioners are concerned with fulfilling consumer needs. SDT, therefore, provides a framework for understanding consumer needs and motivations while offering context for the fulfillment of those needs.

TPB offers marketers particular antecedents for intention and behavior. The theory can be the vehicle for understanding market behavior. While no concrete formulation exists within SDT, concepts such as event valence can be utilized within a TPB framework. Marketing messages that increase a consumer's

perception of autonomy with respect to buying decisions may increase purchase behavior. Messages that are perceived as informational, rather than controlling, should improve the likelihood of response.

Concretely focusing on the antecedents of intention as outlined by TPB is helpful to marketers as well. Helping consumers see the benefits of a purchase (instrumental attitude) may improve their intention to purchase. Showing individuals having a good time with a product may tap into the affective attitude construct as receivers of marketing messages may associate that affect with the product. Leveraging *everyone-will-think-you're-cool* messages plays to the injunctive and descriptive norms of consumers. Making sure that a consumer perceives no barriers to the purchase and utilization of a product directly addresses issues identified by perceived behavioral control.

## Opportunities for Further Research

The opportunities for further research presented by this paper involve testing the explanation of variance in intention in two formats. Using SDT to frame the constructs within TPB may improve the explanation of variance as compared to the traditional understanding of TPB. The framing may affect the individual constructs' explanation of variance in intention. Understanding the magnitude of any change in variance by construct may also offer insights into how concepts of SDT are manifested in human behavior. Within a marketing context, practitioners may be able to leverage more influence over consumers based on the findings.

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**Keywords:** *Theory of Planned Behavior, Self-Determination Theory, Informational Events, Controlling Events*

**Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and Practitioners:** This article is relevant to marketers and researchers as the presented considerations may affect marketing messages. Marketers should contemplate the perceptions of event valence (informational or controlling) as they prepare messages for public consumption.

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**TRACK: Consumer Behavior/Marketing Research**